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ABSTRACT

The reading teacher's role in instructing talented and gifted children is explained in this paper. Goals of instruction are to provide a foundation for learning by structuring materials from which children can build, establishing conditions which foster divergent thinking, providing a setting where creativity is allowed to flourish, allowing children to go beyond the printed page, and encouraging active reading and not passive receptivity. (KS)

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CREATIVE READING FOR THE GIFTED CHILD

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Creative Reading for the Gifted Child

What is creativity? How does it relate to reading and the talented and gifted (TAG) student? Is it something we have been doing for years? Does it happen in all classrooms or only a few?

Let's start with what creativity is; it is the combining of our past experiences with new problems where we synthesize and develop a unique solution, at least a solution that is unique to us.

James Smith defines it as "...sinking down taps into our past experiences and putting these selected experiences together into new patterns, new ideas, or new products." (Smith, 1966)

Creativity is not something we can leave to chance to develop. It is a key aspect of learning and our learning environment.

For the gifted child it is important that creativity not be inhibited or stifled. Who is the TAG child? This child is the child that is gifted intellectually, mechanically, aesthetically and socially. This child may have characteristics from only one of the categories listed, or from several of these categories. For example he/she may be gifted intellectually and also be a social leader in his community. This child is usually well rounded and a leader with his peers. However he/she can have creativity stifled. This may happen when the child attends class with a domineering teacher, or a classroom where conformity is the rule of the game. One of the strong inhibitors of creativity is the school. Creativity is a strong component of the four year old's life. This creativity slowly decreases as the child spends more and more time in the school setting. Of course we have to question if this is a decrease in creativity that

would occur regardless of whether the child is in school or not. A decline might be evident but not to the same degree as it is when conformity to the school setting is present.

What I'm saying is that we must encourage our school to be flexible in the basic teaching structure--flexible for the student to dream, flexible to create, and flexible to explore physically and mentally. In an authoritarian classroom this freedom is lacking, for the student is required to produce specific material and information and nothing else. The student is tied to the printed page and the teacher's directions. The peer group exerts even greater power in this situation as they conform to the regulations.

Let's take an example; remember those classrooms you attended where you were told to open your text to page such and such? If you asked a creative question about the material, you were told to stick to the book! Today in creative classrooms you are encouraged to think of divergent questions and material, to explore on your own or with a friend. Look at the reading lesson where you were told to draw a red circle around the pictures of toys. Today you are asked to draw three red items you saw on the way to school. Divergent thinking then becomes an important part of the reading program for all children and especially for the gifted child.

Let's cover a few of the principles for teaching the gifted and talented child to read creatively.

Develop a motivational tension in the classroom. Motivational tension is relieved by the producing of a creative solution to the problem. Answers that are too easy or only factual stifle creativity.

Provide reading materials that are open-ended. Material that challenges the gifted and talented child to think of divergent endings or endings that use past experience. Allow students to be unique in their thinking and discussions; don't be tied to stereotyping boys' and girls' answers.

Allow children time to solve their own problems. Too often creativity is stifled by the teacher being overly helpful. Sometimes children need to work alone. This can be encouraged by having a quiet corner in the room where no one is to disturb the occupant.

If you are using creative writing as a part of the language experience approach to reading then you need to be aware that censorship or an over emphasis on grammar can kill the creative instinct. Of course conformity to a particular subject also can kill the creative drive. The gifted and talented child will often thrive on the language experience approach to reading. This is an opportunity for him to grow mentally. Your enthusiasm and encouragement can also provide key support needed to develop creativity. Your support can come from listening, really listening as the child talks through his ideas.

At times you will allow a different curriculum to meet the child's individual needs. Being tied to a text or set of materials does nothing to foster the TAG child's creative reading ability.

Creative reading goes into the material and child's experiences, it makes the child read for critical analysis, for synthesizing materials, for evaluating materials. It allows the child to go beyond the printed page.

Creative teaching encourages evaluation of material and the student's revising of an ending for more logical or unusual climax.

I remember the second grade boy that was reading from a basal reader. He read the story and then proceeded to tell me what was wrong with the way the story was written. I had to agree with him that it was a "dumb story". His version made the story more lively and lifelike. In classrooms where children are allowed to change the "dumb story" creativity flourishes. The talented and gifted child can be encouraged to read various materials on the same topic in order to synthesize and evaluate the material. This is an example of where the curriculum materials may be different for the TAG child's needs.

The teacher's role becomes an important aspect of fostering creative learning.

The teacher must provide the basic foundation or structure as Bruner says, for children to discover, explore and build upon. The structure then must provide the atmosphere and conditions necessary for divergent thinking. Divergent thinking means that the teacher must be ready and willing to listen to a variety of answers and questions. No one answer is sacred when the students use divergent thinking. The gifted student can now delve as deeply as he wants into a topic. Now there is no fear of being different or silly.

Here are some principles the teacher may want to follow. (Smith, 1967)

1. All children are born creative.
2. There is a relationship between creativity and intelligence.
3. Creativity is a form of giftedness not measured by intelligence tests.
4. All areas of the curriculum may be used to develop creativity.

5. Creativity is a process and a product.

6. Creativity is developed by focusing on those processes of the intellect which fall under divergent thinking.

7. All creative processes cannot be developed at one time or in one lesson.

8. Creativity cannot be taught; we can only set conditions for it to happen. . .

What Smith is saying is that we must set the conditions for creativity to develop.

Creative teaching allows something new and different to happen. Bring in a new poem, puzzle, song, or story without an ending. Try to splice up each day with something to give it life. This is especially true for the TAG student that needs the new spark for enthusiasm and to create be.

Divergent thinking is a must, try to look for new insights and ideas as the thinking process is stimulated. Delving into known facts as the only answers will lead to rote memorization. The TAG child can have his creative drives stifled by this approach. Only by being allowed to synthesize and evaluate, can his creative drives be developed. Divergent thinking allows the child to delve into diverse areas of knowledge.

Torrence and Smith both recommend motivational tension as a prerequisite to create production. Tension or an unsettled torpedoing atmosphere causes students to strive for a balanced equilibrium. To do this they solve the problem in a creative manner. This is a time when they face the problem alone. Don't give them the solution to the tension or you stifle the creative drive. Also don't look for a specific outcome as this will vary from student to student. Smith

says the child's uniqueness in solving the problem is a principle to stress and to reward.

Creative teaching still requires that basic structure and knowledge be used and provisions be made to apply these to problem solving situations in reading.

All of these principles are related to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. A student that has not had his physiological or safety needs met cannot think of creating. He may use his creativity to solve his basic needs but not to creat new material for those higher levels of the hierarchy such as aesthetic needs.

Let's take an example; if a child comes to school hungry, his physiological needs have not been met. His mind is concentrating on his hunger, not that new set of reading materials you are presenting the class. If there is no method provided to still the hunger pangs, you have lost that student until lunch. He may have a very creative drive but for the moment it is concentrating on hunger not on being creative.

This can also be seen when a child's love and belonging needs are not satisfied. The student that feels alienated in the classroom cannot function creatively. He is so busy trying to be accepted that he has little time to be creative academically. The authoritarian teacher that makes the student feel like a second rate citizen may make the child jump when told to jump but this does not allow the child to be free to arrive at new ideas. We also know that the TAG student needs guidance just as any student needs guidance. Even though he is gifted, we cannot assume that he is also self-directed, self-motivated, and

without problems. Your role will be different with the TAG child but just as crucial as your guidance to any child.

How can we get the TAG child to excell in reading? First we must get his interest. As a TAG student the "same old stuff" will not meet his unique needs. Once his interest is aroused, we need to provide adequate time free from distraction to allow for the Wallas and Marksberry stages of discovery learning to take place. (Biehler, 1974), (Marksberry, 1963) The first stage is preparation for learning. After this has been accomplished we need to allow a period for the material to incubate, to jell in his thinking. The third stage is illumination. Now the student makes sense out of the material. Finally, he can prove or verify his findings. These stages demand time, quiet, and non-interruption. Let's apply them to that unfinished story you brought into the room. The student won't sit down and finish it just because you've given him that assignment. It will take time to incubate the material before the illumination sets in. Only if the student is free to develop his own ending will creative thinking take place. Otherwise it may become a guessing game trying to write the ending the teacher wants.

The TAG child will be quick to know if the teacher expects a specific ending. He is aware of the clues that are carefully hidden in the directions. If the ending that the student develops seems silly or far out, probe farther and you may find there is real meaning behind the silly facade you first saw. Don't leave the gifted student totally on his own. He needs praise and guidance just as much as any child. Provide the TAG student with a large variety of reading materials.

Use a variety of types of material. Use everything from self-written books to kits, to poetry, to varied reading materials. The TAG child often is interested in biographies and science materials. Find out the interest and provide materials to reach the interest so they can read to answer special problems, or in great depth on a topic. Provide materials and time for creative writing. Let the student share his writing with younger children; then he has a double reason to create. Provide interest centers with extensive materials for individual and small group work. Use projects that encourage thinking. Use things like shadow plays, or have music available for writing a song; dioramas are fun and creative and there are many other activities of which you can think. Do allow time for creative dance, role playing, or dramatization. All of these help provide a creative reading program. The thing that holds us too closely to a text or reading series is the thing that stifles creative reading. Be certain to check students' reading capacity and achievement so that help is provided in reading skills. If the student is below his capacity, search for causes and corrections. If you can correct any deficiency as soon as it happens, you will have a head start in helping develop reading capacity so that creative reading can follow. This, of course, demands a diagnostic prescriptive approach to reading.

Creative reading is not just providing various activities of a creative nature. It also includes the type of questioning and direction your reading program takes. Use the higher levels of Bloom's hierarchy of the cognitive domain. Use directed reading with questions that cause the students to evaluate, synthesize, compare, search for

propaganda, and analyze the material to be read. One of the greatest problems in reading classes today is that seldom do the students have the opportunity to use the higher levels of cognition.

Key words for the teacher of a TAG student are flexibility and originality. Allow freedom to explore verbally and physically, provide opportunities for the students to have book talks, role playing, self-planned radio scripts, TV broadcast, etc. As you guide the student in reading let them proceed at their own pace, improve the students self-esteem, guide for rapport among classmates, and provide a time to discuss and share ideas with others.

Recognize the child's unused potential. Encourage its development. You can do this by limiting your censorship to a minimum. Encourage parents and the school board to become interested in the TAG student. Encourage providing for these students as well as for the retarded student. They are just as in need of special help and guidance. Remember they are one of our most valuable natural resources. Let's not waste that huge resource of untapped wealth.

Thus the teacher's role in creative teaching is to:

1. provide foundation or structure material on which children can build.
2. develop creative attitude and atmosphere.
3. provide conditions fostering divergent thinking.
4. provide for a quiet, uninterrupted place where creativity is allowed to flurish.
5. be open to new ideas.
6. allow children to go beyond the printed page, and
7. encourage children to be active readers not passive recipients.

Many of these suggestions apply to all children, but they are especially pertinent for the TAG child in the reading class. Let us cultivate that untapped resource.

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